

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)



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Jen Riday

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You are listening to the Vibrant Happy Women podcast. I'm Jen Riday and in this episode, we're talking about how to create a beautiful life even when things seem hard. Stay tuned.

Hi, I'm Jen Riday. This podcast is for women who want to feel more vibrant, happy, aligned, and alive. You'll gain the emotional, physical, and spiritual tools you need to get your sparkle back and ensure that depression, anxiety, and struggle don't rule your life. Welcome to the Vibrant Happy Women Podcast.

Hey there my friends, Jen here. And I am super excited about today's episode because I am interviewing and talking with my friend, Maria. Maria is from Madison, Wisconsin, one of its suburbs. And we met through the Vibrant Happy Women Club. I was in a class, teaching a class one day and Maria was one of the students. And we were talking with her about something, and she said, "Hey, I'm from Fitchburg, Wisconsin." And I said, "No way. I'm from Madison, Wisconsin." She said, "I know, I've been listening to your podcast for years."

And so the day came during COVID about six months ago that Maria and I decided to get together for lunch. And we really hit it off. So we've been walking partners since then. She has some really interesting things that have happened in her life and she's going to share them on this episode. This episode is titled Creating a Beautiful Life because Maria has done that. She does not engage in any victim thinking. She doesn't really feel sorry for herself. She does allow herself to feel her emotions. She does allow herself to focus on her ideals, the things she does want to feel.

She doesn't get attached to certain outcomes in her life. And I think these are some of the strategies that people use to create that beautiful life. It's not always about the outcomes. It's not always about having what you expected to have, which Maria has not had everything she expected to have and that's okay. Her life is still beautiful. So I'm excited for you to hear

[Vibrant Happy Women](#) with Jen Riday

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

Maria's stories, what she has experienced and to kind of glean some ideas for how you might apply this in your life so you too can create a beautiful life even when things are hard. So let's go ahead and dive in.

Jen: Hey everyone, I am talking with Maria L today. And I pause because I'm not saying your full name. And we'll explain why in a minute. Maria is a member of the Vibrant Happy Women Club which is where I met her. So one day she was in one of our classes and we were talking, and Maria said, "I'm from Fitchburg, Wisconsin." And I said, "No way." Fitchburg is essentially a suburb of Madison, Wisconsin, I'm from Verona, another suburb of Madison. Our kids are technically in the same school district, although Maria has her kids going somewhere else.

It's so cool because Maria and I have become actual in person friends. We walk together. And I'm super excited to have her on the show. She's going to share some stories, some challenges she's been through and some of the tools that have helped her through those challenges. So I am super excited. Welcome, Maria.

Maria: Yes, thank you for having me, Jen. I'm excited for today.

Jen: Yeah. Thank you for being on. You're so brave. Sometimes I ask my friends to be on and they immediately freeze up and say, "No, I can't do that. That's too scary." And you jumped right in, so thank you. So we met in the club. And I began to walk with you. And I learned this really awesome, fascinating story of how you've made it through a divorce. And you have some other interesting stories you're going to come to. And I remarked kind of in my mind, thought in my mind of how strong you are, how healthy you seem because it was kind of a tricky, more difficult divorce.

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

And it's just not impacted in the ways I've seen so many other women. So what has helped you? Well, tell us the story, what you feel comfortable sharing about your divorce and how you felt throughout that experience and the tools that helped you.

Maria: Thank you for that. So I would say that I think I'm similar to a lot of women going through the situation which was outwardly we looked like a beautiful family. We had two children, a nice house, good friends, and careers that were successful. And I think everyone thought generally, who didn't know us super well that we were a very happy family. And then you would close the door behind us and the energy in the house was very uncomfortable. He was dealing with addiction. I had undiagnosed ADHD.

And I think through all of that, the relationship deteriorated through time. And so after the 15 years that we were together I actually hired a counselor. We went to our fourth marriage counselor. And I had her help me leave him. By that time I was too nervous to do it on my own. I needed some support to make sure it would be done in a safe way. And his sisters came in and helped him. He through the time had been again dealing with plenty of addiction and trying to support him getting some help while I went off and got my own help. So that's kind of the story of that divorce.

And so the divorce was ugly. It took a good year and a half to get done. And I think the total cost, so I always tell the cost only because you can tell how tumultuous it was. It was \$160,000 of lawyer fees alone going back and forth.

Jen: My gosh. And so that's hands down clearly a trauma. You went through a trauma during this divorce proceedings.

Maria: Yeah. And there was inner trauma in the relationship too with then going through this, kind of now it was kind of exposed, now everyone kind of saw it. As well as I think a lot of people who thought we had this beautiful

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

relationship, I had to explain to everybody that it really wasn't what they thought. But then at the same time he was explaining, and he was clearly blindsided by going through his own journey as well. We went through this divorce.

And then of course the hardest part is that I don't have my children all the time and so I'm just heartbroken about that. So that's when two things happened. I found Al-Anon. So for those people who don't know what Al-Anon is. It is the other side of AA, so it's for friends and family of people who have addictions. And I started to go to meetings. And I remember my first meeting I cried the whole time. And I'm not a crier, so I was like, oh my gosh. And then my third meeting was right before thanksgiving.

And I think the biggest value I brought to that meeting was that the guy next to me, it was his first meeting and I think he felt so sorry for me because I was so sad next to him, that he felt like he probably really had a good life compared to mine. Oh my gosh, it was crazy. But through Al-Anon I was able to learn that I need to keep my side of the street clean. I need to not focus on trying to clean up his messes. So his messes are his.

They preach the serenity prayer, so if anybody's familiar with that, it's basically that you are keeping out of someone's business until you have to step in, so knowing when to do that. So I have the serenity prayer all over my house, trying to understand, hey, I'm not going to get involved until I know I have to. And just really putting the focus on me and one day at a time and surrender really a lot of [inaudible]. And so that's what I did.

Jen: And that's why we're using Maria L because anonymous, Al-Anon stands for anonymous. And so why do we stay anonymous, what's behind that?

Maria: That is the traditions that they came up with. And sometimes I get frustrated because I feel those are traditions from the 1950s. And we're a

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

little bit further along. They really do not want to promote Al-Anon in a way that – they want people to be anonymous when they come in, to feel comfortable that they can come in and not be exploited a little bit, yeah. So that is the reason.

Jen: That's great. Safety, emotional safety.

Maria: Safety, yeah, here we go. Yeah. So Al-anon has been a key tool for me. I used to go every other day. Now I go every few weeks. And just realized I probably need to increase that. I was just talking to one of my Al-Anon friends before I got on this call. And we're both like, "Let's meet on Friday. We need to get some more goodness in us." So we'll go and do a meeting and it usually puts us back on track and it's been good. And there's so many wise people. And it's the only place I go where everybody there, their only objective is to get better.

It's not like we're trying to create the best whatever bake sale or project plan. We are there to just better ourselves and spend a little time breathing, so it's so nice.

Jen: Yeah. When I met you, you told me this story and I thought, oh my goodness, that's such a traumatic experience. And you had to learn your boundaries. So what specific tools were most helpful for you aside from the meetings for Al-Anon, of getting your mindset where you wanted it to be after all of that stress and struggle?

Maria: I am in sales, and I sell technology. And when I have a certain technology, I usually get certified in it. And then until the next version comes out and I'm pretty good. I kind of don't have to spend a lot of time there. And what I've realized is that wellness and mindfulness, and just working on yourself is ongoing. And there is not a certification that you get and then you're done. It is something that you have to pick up a little bit every day and figuring that out.

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

Early on I used to have some readings that I would do. Now what I do is that I do a lot of grateful lists. So I start out with grateful lists. And that's actually running into how I met you. And so I think we met six months ago, Jen, would that be right?

Jen: Yeah, I think so.

Maria: Yeah, we went for lunch, I think. And I was like, "Oh my God." I seriously was sweating. I was like, "I feel like I'm meeting a celebrity because I have felt like you've been in my life for six years, but I actually didn't even know you." And so I, during early on in the divorce, I found your podcast. And I would just listen to it nonstop. And would go inside – our grounds were a mess, and I would clean up the flowerbeds and I would just cram your podcasts ongoing for hours. And just get all that goodness in my head, so I could think about good thoughts and not any of the hard ones that I was going through.

And so going back to changing your thoughts and changing your mindset. I was able to do that really through your podcast. And so that was one of the tools that I used quite often. And then COVID hit, and I decided that I needed to do a few more things to get my mindset in a good place because again COVID was tough on all of us. And so this is fast forward. So my divorce, this all happened, it's going to be six years here. So COVID happened two years ago, and I needed to get my mindset back again.

And so I signed up for the Vibrant Happy Women Club. And was able to start to leverage Al-Anon and then the tools that you brought to the table that were really beneficial as well. And so some of the things that I was able to do was, you have kind of the bold morning routine. And so not to give you too much information, but some of that is breathing and journaling, and just spending some time on you in the morning. I've always worked out in the morning which is great, and I never gave that up.

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

But I think there has to be some quiet time in there to. You go from workout to getting the kids out of bed, to getting everybody moving. And especially now I work from home, then I jump right to work as soon as they get to school. And if I don't spend a little time in the morning with a pause, I can get a little bit messy by the end. Your Vibrant Happy Women Club really helped me understand and gave me some tools to be able to do that. So that was great.

And then part of COVID one of the other journeys I decided to do because I had some time on my hands. I took a 23andMe test, so a DNA test. And the reason I did that is because I was adopted. And so that was back in the day when they did private adoptions, and I had no clue who my biological parents were. And I really took it because of the medical side. I go to these appointments with my children, and they ask about heart disease and cancer and all this other stuff. And I have no clue. And so I felt I owed to them and myself to go ahead and just do this genetic testing.

And so I did that and got some results back. And I would recommend it to anybody. It is so interesting. Little interesting things like I like chocolate ice-cream more than vanilla. And they could tell me that and it is true. It was crazy. My middle toe is longer than my big toe and that is true. And so it's really interesting the stuff that they can tell you. But it also can tell you a lot of good things about genes and traits. And the good thing was that I was not, according to the 23andMe, and of course it doesn't test everything, but it tests a lot of stuff.

And there is nothing I was sending onto my kids, which was good. But then part of that also is connecting you with relatives which you don't have to sign up for that. I did. I wasn't sure if I was going to because that really wasn't the point of this. But when I did that, I was actually able to get connected with an aunt and some cousins. And of course I don't know which side they're from. And I didn't do anything for a month. But then after

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

a month I decided, I preysed on it and I decided you know what, it's probably – I always regret what I don't do. I don't regret what I do usually.

So I decided that I was going to reach out but in a very non-committal way, just that, hey, I'm out here. I don't know if you know about me. But I've had a beautiful life and I just wanted to let you know that apparently that we have a relationship or that we're connected. She was lovely and she came back. And she knew nothing about me, which equals that was my father because especially back in the day they could walk away without much responsibility. And my parents, my adoptive parents were really honest with me which I really appreciate always in my life.

And they tell me that I was adopted. I was adopted at eight weeks old, I think. They tried to get me earlier, but the biological father couldn't be found and wouldn't sign off on me originally. And then they finally got him to sign the papers so I could be removed from foster care and put into their home. And so I knew that about him. So I knew he was reluctant about this. And so when I reached out to the aunt, again, she had said that she didn't know about me, but she was very welcoming and very sweet.

And then as part of this too I actually also got connected with a niece. So then I had two biological half-sisters that did not know about me either and all of a sudden, they did. And so it was interesting. He's a multi multimillionaire up in Northern Wisconsin. And the aunt was really nervous. And I really just wanted to find my mother quite honestly. I knew this gentleman wasn't too interested in me. But I was going to go up and ask him to give me my mother's name. And she decided it was best that maybe I just write him a letter and see how that goes.

And he basically read the letter and dismissed the situation, said he didn't know the name. And so even though I knew that that was probably the outcome it didn't mean it didn't hurt. And so to be rejected twice by somebody is not easy for sure, even though I knew that was probably going

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

to be the case. And so one of the things going back to the Vibrant Women Happy or the Happy Vibrant Women Club is that you have a technique called chair work. And I'm probably going to bodge it a little bit.

But basically, it's sitting somebody that you're struggling with across from you and saying things that you could never say to them. And I was able to do that and just give him a piece of my mind. And again he is just there in spirit and not in reality. By the end of it, Jen, he was sweating.

Jen: In your mind?

Maria: In my mind. Exactly.

Jen: So you were really letting him have it there in the chair?

Maria: Absolutely. How could you not acknowledge me? How could you bring somebody into this world and pretend it never happened and you get a second chance, and you did it again. And also part of your tools that you have is to do this inner child work and basically taking little Maria and letting her come out and give him a piece of her mind too. Because she knew early on that that was the case as well, that he didn't even want to acknowledge that this had happened.

And so it was really healing. And after I got rid of that layer of anger, and frustration, and hurt, I was able to give him a place of gratefulness. And say, "I'm so grateful that you put me into this world. I mean if it wasn't for you, I wouldn't be here." I mean how amazing is that? And that is where your purpose in my life ended. And thank God I was able to do that work and get to that place. And I've got to tell you that going back to nothing's certified on wellness.

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

I have to sit him down every once in a while, and give him a piece of my mind because it comes back, I can always get back to that place of thank you. Thank you for putting me in this world, I appreciate it.

Jen: Yeah, that's so cool.

Maria: So then I decided that I did want to still find out who my mother was. And I'd realized it was not going to happen through 23andMe. And so I was able to fill out some documentation for the state of Wisconsin and then the aunt from my father's side was able to give me quite a bit of information just about the father who was on the record as well as some information about the mother just through some family gossip or whatever. And anyway, through that I was able to then find out the name of my bio mom.

And so then the state had contacted her, and she was very interested in meeting, and she filled out some medical forms. And it's still all kind of snail mail so it took a couple of weeks. But then I did get her information and emailed her, we were able to finally meet. So it was awesome. And the crazy thing about the situation is that I am her only child. So she actually never had any other children but me. So this was, yeah, huge.

Jen: How did she feel when you connected, how did that go?

Maria: So the state contacted her and called her. And they asked if it was okay to send this information and if she signed off and I was interested in meeting. And she said she was taking her dog for a walk, and she was underneath the tree. She remembers exactly where she was. She remembers the tree. She was just staring at it for a second. And for a long time was like, "I can't believe this is happening. This is what I've always wanted."

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

Jen: Because she knew you were out there, and she could never have kids after that?

Maria: No, exactly. And when you're adopted in a private adoption like this, you're kind of always just looking to see, does someone look like me kind of thing. But you don't know if you'll ever be able to be connected. And the fact that you know you kind of have an angel out there, but you don't know where they are or what's going on with them. And for both of us, I don't know if we even knew if each other was still living for that matter. And so to have all that confirmed and be able to meet I think was a really great thing.

Jen: Yeah. And do you look alike?

Maria: A little bit, yeah, a little bit, we do look a little, more so than my adoptive parents for sure.

Jen: Yeah. That's so fun. So is she in your life now in some way?

Maria: Yeah. She actually just came down to Madison two weeks ago to meet my parents, so that everybody's met. And that's kind of an extension of my family so it's been so good. And my adoptive parents have been so amazing. And the first thing that came up for me is I felt like I was cheating on my mom. And it wasn't that I was missing anything from a parenting perspective at all. It was just that a part of me was missing. Who am I and where am I from and that kind of information. So I just wanted to make sure that my parents knew that.

My adoptive mom was so amazing, and she was like, "It's just another person to love you and we are so happy."

Jen: Aww, good.

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

Maria: Yeah, it is so good.

Jen: That's fantastic. I mean it's a story you would expect to see on a TV series or something.

Maria: Right, like a long time movie camera's out, let's go.

Jen: Yeah. So those two stories are amazing. And then just as we came together to record this podcast you have another event happening in your life. Tell us about that. Yeah.

Maria: Yeah. So then when I met my biological mother, she's a nurse actually. And so she's very medical which is interesting when you don't have that in your life. But one of the first things she said to me is, "Go get your mammograms because your two aunts", so she has one brother and two sisters. My two aunts have had breast cancer and she never did though. And she said, "Just keep up with your mammograms and make sure everything stays healthy there." So I went and did that.

It had been actually probably 17 months since my last mammogram, because of COVID I went for a little longer than I had thought I did. When I got – they called me back a couple times and I really didn't think much of it. But for the third time, and I had a biopsy, I do have stage one breast cancer. So here I am with another situation that we will tackle and get through. But now it's going back to using all those tools again and just finding space for myself and continuing to move forward.

But also being able to try to do it with grace and get that grateful list back. And understand all the reasons why this is going to be just fine.

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

Jen: I look that outlook. I'm sorry this happened but also, it's really kind of miraculous that you connected with your mom, and she gave you that information and that reminder just in time maybe.

Maria: Don't you think? I mean I think it's the universe, was talking to me and yes, I think that's true.

Jen: And so now you're waiting on another genetic test, is that right?

Maria: Got another genetic test which is much more thorough. And so it will identify if I have the breast cancer gene. It actually will also do a few other cancers too so that will be interesting. So based on that information I can make a final decision as to if I will have a mastectomy or a lumpectomy. So I'll figure out that information and do that work and figure out the next steps from there.

Jen: Yeah. So this is a really interesting position you're in. you've come through that struggle of the divorce. You have tools in your pocket. You have the chair method you love, inner child work, you have AI-Anon. Before we began interviewing you mentioned the week at a glance from the club. You have tools, you've been through something, you know how strong you are. As you look forward toward whatever's happening with breast cancer, what is helping you the most to maintain that positive mindset?

Maria: Well, and I think I have always been pretty positive. So I have just, I think that in my life I have realized that if I look at the brighter side of things it seems to always turn out brighter. And one of the things in your program you always talk about – you talked about manifesting. And not only being grateful for what you have now but grateful for the future. And I always just have a good outlook. And so meaning that it even might be [inaudible] right now but this too will end. And the good will end too, so be grateful for that. Life brings you highs and lows and ups and downs.

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

And if you just walk forward and feel some of that pain, something beautiful in the end will usually come out of it. I was a person however before this divorce, who really didn't like pain a whole lot. But then realized that I'm going to have to go through it anyway, so just walk through that, feel it and usually at the other end comes out pretty beautiful. And I really have a beautiful life. And usually at the end of these, Jen, you ask, "What's your advice?" But I'll just give it to you now.

And it's that in the past I had always had outcomes, I want to graduate college at this age. I want to have a career by this age. I want to be married by this age. And I want to have two kids, and a beautiful home, and this and that. And really hung on tight to those outcomes. And actually hung on to a marriage too long and other things in my life too long because that was the outcome that I had in my mind. And I think if I actually just visualize ideals and not outcomes, that I allow my life to be more beautiful than I ever imagined.

My ideals are I want joy, and I want to be healthy, and I want to have grace, and I want to have freedom, and fun, and feel all my feelings. And those are the ideals that I have.

Jen: So you're visualizing how you want to feel which is really how the law of attraction and manifesting work anyway, instead of things you want to own or outcomes you want to have.

Maria: Yeah, because when I got stuck in outcomes, I would sit in Al-Anon the first few months of my divorce and I would cry, and cry, and cry because I just thought I would be married forever. And I thought that's what I was going to give my children. And that wasn't my reality. That was not what was going to be healthy for everyone. And I just realized that if I hang on to all those outcomes too hard, I will not live the most beautiful life that I can.

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

Jen: Things will pass you by. Earlier in the interview you said, “I usually only regret the things I don’t do rather than the things I do, do.” So any advice for us based on that maxim that you believe?

Maria: Courage to just kind of put yourself out there and look a little, you know, maybe not feel – get out of your comfort zone a little bit and just go do. And sometimes – I mean the hardest thing about –going back to reaching out to my biological aunt, was that I could have been rejected and I was, I guess when you look at my father. But I put myself out there knowing rejection was one of the options and in some ways it did happen. But it still opened up some really interesting things.

I mean I walked into an appointment today for a genetics with a document that was fully filled out for the first time in my life. I could fill out all of my genetic information about my past and that was the first time I did that because I did make that first move.

Jen: Yeah. You took a leap and then you reaped the rewards of that, getting out of that comfort zone, yeah. Now you have a new person in your life who can love you. Your kids have a new person. What does she think of your kids? I mean she not only has a daughter now but grandchildren.

Maria: I know, isn’t that amazing? And my kids are so good with her too. I’m so proud of them. But they call her Grandma Tina. I mean I don’t think she ever thought she’d have that in her life and now she does. She is just over the moon with just having this whole new family that she created and never even fully realized, so it’s cool.

Jen: Well, Maria, I think you’re amazing. I admire you. I’m so glad we’re friends. And the story is fantastic. And I hope everyone takes away the idea of courage and positivity. I mean you’ve struggled, and you’ve hurt, and you faced your feelings and you let them move through you. And you recognize life is 50/50. And you choose to have that gratitude list. You

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

choose to focus on your ideals, how you do want to feel. And that is a beautiful life like you said, really that is how to create a beautiful life. I think you're doing fantastically. So thank you for sharing.

Maria: Thank you, Jen. Also thank you for making such a difference in so many people's lives, so many women's lives. You definitely made a difference in mine. And you probably don't even realize the effects that you're having out there. But you are definitely changing people and how they think, and how they move, and how they approach their life. So thank you for all your good work, it's just so appreciated.

Jen: Thank you. I really appreciate that.

I hope Maria's story has touched your heart in some way and that you can apply what you learned and that you too can create a beautiful life even when you have struggles. The fact is we all struggle. One thing I've learned from interacting with all the women I meet through my podcast and through the Vibrant Happy Club is that many women, I would say a majority of women believe a story that they are one of the only ones struggling in the exact way that they are.

And over time I've come to see that nothing could be further from the truth. When we recognize and get to interact with others who are willing to be vulnerable and share their struggles, and share the tools and tricks, and mindset tips they have to stay positive and continue to create that beautiful life when they're struggling, it helps us. They say we tend to be like the five people we interact with most.

And I'm so grateful that I get to interact with people like Maria, all the other fantastic women in the Vibrant Happy Women Club because they are

298: Creating a Beautiful Life (with Maria L)

focused on living the most beautiful life they can. Never being a victim of their circumstances, choosing positivity, choosing to use the tools that help them to heal, to let go and to release those past traumas and stressors, and choosing to use the tools that help them to maximize their time, to focus on how they do want to feel.

Happiness is within all of our reach, I really believe this. And I am so grateful to get to do this work that I do. My friends, I love you, I am here for you. I admire you. I support you and I encourage you, I am cheerleading for you because you deserve a beautiful life. And the beautiful thing is that we all can create it, no matter how we might be struggling. We get to choose how we think, and how we feel, and how we show up. And I hope that feels true to you. Breathe that in and let that be your truth as well.

And if you want to have help with locking in that mindset of beautiful living for yourself, that mindset of positivity and putting those tools in your toolbelt that help you to forgive, and let go, and release the past emotional baggage, the tools that help you learn how to set and maintain those healthy boundaries that Maria has with her ex-husband, join us in the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's a beautiful place, positive, supportive, encouraging and lots of likeminded women on that same journey of creating their beautiful lives.

My friends, I love you. I will see you again next time. Until then make it a vibrant and happy week. Take care.

If you enjoy this podcast, you have to check out the Vibrant Happy Women Club. It's my monthly group coaching program where we take all this material to the next level and to get you the results that will blow your mind. Join me in the Vibrant Happy Women Club at jenriday.com/join.